



The Bath by Ingelise Johnson

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Our Day in the Sun"  
McAllen Visual Arts Teachers at the Upper Valley Art League  
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Mission  
When: July 13-August 9, 2019  
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday  
Contact: (956) 583-2787  
Free and open to the public

## Those Who Teach

This exhibit showcases local art teachers whose art works rarely get public attention.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Our Day in the Sun" at the Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center offers us a brief survey of the personal art works from McAllen's secondary school art teachers. Stimulating works by seven teachers are centrally organized within the large art space. This show is special in that art teachers typically lack the time for personal art production; their time and energy is devoted to guiding others through the realm of art. In fact, less than half of the MISD art teachers were able to participate. Exhibitors include Xavier Perez, Ingelise Johnson, Lorena Gonzalez, Gabriel Martinez Carmen Valladares Fortuna, Wendy Gilbert, Fred Gonzalez, and Lisa Saenz-Saldivar, representing Lamar/Options High School, McAllen High School, Rowe High School, and DeLeon Middle School.

This exhibit offers quite differing approaches to expression within conventional formats, and attention to medium is a motivating force. Johnson's figurative paintings rely on the importance of drawing combined with smooth brush precision to produce believable representation. In "The Bath" the bather's position on the picture plane along with her pose and contained expression evokes an empathetic concern. Perez sees an identifiable and turbulent reality with his bold achromatic linoleum relief prints; the Valley wind becomes a visible subject. His compositions speak of life in the Valley and although he is generally optimistic, there is duality here. His print, "Our Town Could Be Your Life", sees a valley town as a human life with all its complexities – times of pleasure coexist with political anxieties, both experiencing the sudden mood swing of a hurricane. The winsome print, "A Place You've Only Read About" posts the statement, "It's never going to be as good as it could have been". The source of Perez' contradictions may lie in his comment, "Growing up I felt this wasn't a place where I wanted to live, but as I got older and I left and came back, it made me realize how special this place is." All the subjects in the works of Johnson and Perez express contending with physical or psychological forces.

Gonzalez is mainly interested in the paint medium as his inspiration, how it can look and what it might suggest without too much coaxing. He likes to start his works with spray paint and custom stencils. "Starting something is the hardest part of the process," he admitted, "so rather than dwelling on meticulous subject matter, I want to get something going. I'll spray paint or splatter some stuff on the surface, leave it for a few days and then come back to it with fresh eyes." Shapes that seem to emerge through this process are often loteria imagery, calaveras, or familiar objects. His painting, "Beautiful Disaster", embodies this tendency. "I looked at it and saw the palm tree," he reflected, "the symbolism of where I'm from. I try to just have fun with painting and show my interest in color."

Vivid hues are seen in Martinez' ceramics and Valladares' intense acrylics. Valladares, Gilbert, and Saenz-Saldivar express fascinating repetitions with distinctly beautiful patterns.

"The show highlights the different styles of each artist," concluded Perez, "and we all have very different styles and I think that's also representative of our teaching styles. They're all different, but they all work together." Interestingly, a unifying factor in "Our Day in the Sun" is the expression of energies confined within a given boundary.

*Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at [nmoyer@rgv.rr.com](mailto:nmoyer@rgv.rr.com)*